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BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

Scriabin

COMPLETE PRELUDES

Dmitri Alexeev

Alexander Scriabin 1872–1915

Compact Disc 1

1	3 Morceaux Op.2: No.2 Prelude in B		56'51
2	Prelude and Nocturne for the Left Hand Op.9: No.1 Prelude in C sharp minor		0'49 2'41
	24 Preludes Op.11		
3	No.1 in C	<i>Moscow, November 1893</i>	0'59
4	No.2 in A minor	<i>Moscow, November 1895</i>	1'59
5	No.3 in G	<i>Heidelberg, May 1895</i>	1'01
6	No.4 in E minor	<i>Lefortovo, Moscow, 1888</i>	1'41
7	No.5 in D	<i>Amsterdam, February 1896</i>	1'25
8	No.6 in B minor	<i>Kiev, 1889</i>	0'49
9	No.7 in A	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	0'52
10	No.8 in F sharp minor	<i>Paris, February 1896</i>	1'40
11	No.9 in E	<i>Moscow, November 1895</i>	1'12
12	No.10 in C sharp minor	<i>Moscow, 1894</i>	1'03
13	No.11 in B	<i>Moscow, November 1895</i>	1'24
14	No.12 in G sharp minor	<i>Vitznau, June 1895</i>	1'28
15	No.13 in G flat	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'40
16	No.14 in E flat minor	<i>Dresden, May 1895</i>	1'11
17	No.15 in D flat	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'59
18	No.16 in B flat minor	<i>Moscow, November 1895</i>	2'29
19	No.17 in A flat	<i>Vitznau, June 1895</i>	0'35
20	No.18 in F minor	<i>Vitznau, June 1895</i>	1'00
21	No.19 in E flat	<i>Heidelberg, May/June 1895</i>	1'13
22	No.20 in C minor	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'03
23	No.21 in B flat	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'42
24	No.22 in G minor	<i>Paris, February 1896</i>	1'01
25	No.23 in F	<i>Vitznau, June 1895</i>	0'48
26	No.24 in D minor	<i>Heidelberg, May/June 1895</i>	1'01

	6 Preludes Op.13		
27	No.1 in C	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	2'20
28	No.2 in A minor	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	0'42
29	No.3 in G	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	0'56
30	No.4 in E minor	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'23
31	No.5 in D	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'05
32	No.6 in B minor	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'37
	5 Preludes Op.15		
33	No.1 in A	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'39
34	No.2 in F sharp minor	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'03
35	No.3 in E	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	1'03
36	No.4 in E	<i>Paris, February 1896</i>	1'23
37	No.5 in C sharp minor	<i>Heidelberg, May/June 1895</i>	1'06
	5 Preludes Op.16		
38	No.1 in B	<i>Moscow, January 1894</i>	1'58
39	No.2 in G sharp minor	<i>Vitznau, June 1895</i>	1'20
40	No.3 in G flat	<i>Moscow, 1894</i>	2'01
41	No.4 in E flat minor	<i>St Petersburg, April 1895</i>	1'10
42	No.5 in F sharp	<i>Moscow, 1895</i>	0'55

Compact Disc 2		63'43	
7 Preludes Op.17			
1	No.1 in D minor	<i>Paris, February 1896</i>	1'41
2	No.2 in E flat	<i>Paris, February 1896</i>	0'52
3	No.3 in D flat	<i>Paris, February 1896</i>	1'49
4	No.4 in B flat minor	<i>Moscow, November 1895</i>	1'04
5	No.5 in F minor	<i>Heidelberg, May/June 1895</i>	1'16
6	No.6 in B flat	<i>Heidelberg, May/June 1895</i>	1'16
7	No.7 in G minor	<i>St Petersburg, April 1895</i>	1'37
4 Preludes Op.22			
8	No.1 in G sharp minor		1'21
9	No.2 in C sharp minor		0'53
10	No.3 in B		1'06
11	No.4 in B minor		1'15
2 Preludes Op.27			
12	No.1 in G minor		2'03
13	No.2 in B		1'03
4 Preludes Op.31			
14	No.1 in D flat/C		2'19
15	No.2 in F sharp minor		0'51
16	No.3 in E flat minor		0'40
17	No.4 in C		1'06
4 Preludes Op.33			
18	No.1 in E		1'09
19	No.2 in F sharp		0'58
20	No.3 in C		0'30
21	No.4 in A flat		1'10
3 Preludes Op.35			
22	No.1 in D flat		1'03
23	No.2 in B flat		2'28
24	No.3 in C		1'12
4 Preludes Op.37			
25	No.1 in B flat minor		1'43
26	No.2 in F sharp		1'01
27	No.3 in B		1'46
28	No.4 in G minor		1'06
4 Preludes Op.39			
29	No.1 in F sharp		0'54
30	No.2 in D		1'12
31	No.3 in G		1'16
32	No.4 in A flat		0'51
33	3 Morceaux Op.45: No.3 Prelude in E flat		1'15
4 Preludes Op.48			
34	No.1 in F sharp		0'41
35	No.2 in C		1'18
36	No.3 in D flat		0'55
37	No.4 in C		1'02
38	3 Morceaux Op.49: No.2 Prelude in F		0'55
39	4 Morceaux Op.51: No.2 Prelude in A minor		2'02
40	4 Morceaux Op.56: No.1 Prelude in E flat		1'08
41	2 Morceaux Op.59: No.2 Prelude		1'45

2 Preludes Op.67	
42	No.1 1'22
43	No.2 0'57
5 Preludes Op.74	
44	No.1 Dououreux, déchirant 1'15
45	No.2 Très lent, contemplatif 4'56
46	No.3 Allegro drammatico 0'55
47	No.4 Lent, vague, indécis 1'19
48	No.5 Fier, belliqueux 1'04

Dmitri Alexeev *piano*

Recording: 10–11, 16–17 July 2017, Henry Wood Hall, London
 Producer: Ken Blair
 Balance engineer: Will Anderson
 Audio editor: Ken Blair
 Piano technician: Peter Salisbury
 Piano: Steinway D grand piano 235, courtesy of Royal Festival Hall, SBC, London
 Photo of Dmitri Alexeev: © John Garfield
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Alexander Scriabin's 90 preludes span the entirety of the three periods into which his musical career is usually divided. Around half of these fall into the so-called first period, lasting from approximately 1888 to 1900, in which the composer's music was distinctly marked by the influence of Chopin. By the time the young Scriabin embarked on his ambitious project to match, indeed outdo, Chopin's cycle of Preludes Op.28 in all the major and minor keys, he had already produced two isolated examples: the delicate Prelude in B major Op.3 No.2, composed in 1889; and the Prelude for the Left Hand Alone in C sharp minor Op.9 No.1, published in 1894. The latter, together with its companion in the same opus, Nocturne, originated in the aftermath of Scriabin's potentially career-threatening injury which he sustained to his right hand in 1891.

In May 1894, Scriabin entered the orbit of the influential patron and publisher, Mitrofan Belyayev, who, until his death in December 1903, was immensely supportive of Scriabin's musical development. Whilst Scriabin may well have already begun work on his ambitious prelude-cycle by then, there is also a possibility that the idea originated with Belyayev who, in November 1895, challenged the composer to a bet that Scriabin would be unable to complete a set of 48 preludes by the following April. Since the majority of the compositions had already been written by this time, it does seem likely that a double cycle had already been planned, and Belyayev was in effect trying to bribe the unreliable composer to adhere to an agreed schedule. In the end Scriabin completed only 46 new pieces that later became Opp. 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17.

In actual fact Scriabin had very nearly realised his initial plan. However, not wanting to delay the publication of his Preludes simply because a couple were either missing or not to his liking (and hence left unfinished), he suggested that Belyayev publish them in groups rather than as a complete set. In doing so, Scriabin had freed himself from any self-imposed obligations: 'In truth,' he wrote, 'it doesn't really matter. After all, the crux of the matter is not that there must be two [preludes] in each key. Every Prelude is a small composition that can exist independently on its own terms'.

After much agonizing over how to arrange the published preludes, it was decided to adopt Chopin's scheme of ascending fifths from C major. Thus, the first 24 preludes appeared in 1897 in four volumes as Op.11. The remaining 23 were divided into four more sets that also appeared in the same year: Op.13 and Opp. 15–17. The original key sequence was maintained in Opp.13 and 15 (with the insertion of the additional E major prelude), but was then subsequently abandoned for the others.

Scriabin's fastidious habit of indicating the date and location of composition allows us to trace groups of roughly contemporary pieces. Consequently, it can be seen that 45 of the preludes were written over a two-and-a-half-year period between November 1893 and February 1896. Several were composed during his tours abroad, which explains why these preludes are sometimes inaccurately described as 'musical postcards'. That said, some may indeed be inspired by programmatic associations from these travels, such as Op.11 No.14 which was apparently a response to the mountain torrent at the spectacular Bastei rock formation near Dresden. Furthermore, it is possible to discern affinities between works written at the same time and it is interesting to listen to them in contemporaneous sequences, for example those composed in Moscow in the winter of November 1895 (probably written in immediate response to Belyayev's wager); or the Parisian group from the early spring of 1896 when Scriabin was infatuated with a mysterious Russian woman known only by her initials MKF. The two apparently became engaged with Scriabin describing this period as one in which he 'drowned himself in pleasure'. Yet, by October 1896 the brief relationship with MKF was over and in December he was engaged to Vera Isakovich, a pianist whom he had first met two years earlier.

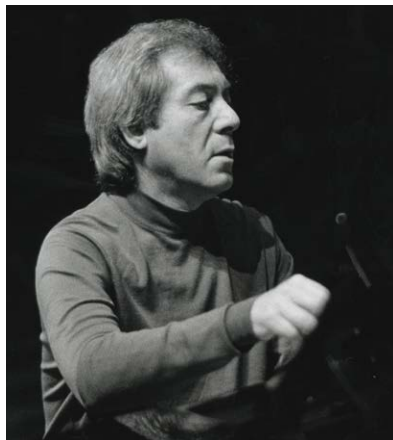
Scriabin's Preludes Op.22 were completed in early 1897. The tortuous process of their birth was vividly described by his devoted aunt: after several days of nervous prostration and near hysteria during which, at one point, she had to 'grip his head tightly' in her hands, Scriabin stayed up all night at the keyboard to deliver the new composition, whereby he greeted the morning with 'a radiant and blissful face'.

The following 2 Preludes Op.27 (1901) finally exorcised the spirit of Chopin which had hovered over their predecessors, and mark the end of the 'first period'.

In November 1903 Scriabin visited St Petersburg for the annual celebration of Belyayev's name day. On this occasion Scriabin presented him with a large number of compositions on which he had been working over the previous three years. Amongst the 36 works for piano were 19 more preludes, published as Opp. 31, 33, 35, 37 and 39. Whilst more harmonically adventurous, these 'middle period' works remain within the bounds of conventional tonality, even if the tonal centre implied by the key signature of each piece is often difficult to determine. In Op.37 No.2 the 'mystic chord' – a prominent feature that can be found in one form or another in much of Scriabin's later music – makes a subliminal first appearance.

Over the next three years Scriabin produced few preludes. Apart from the Op.48 set these mostly exist as single works associated with other short pieces: Op.45 No.3, Op.49 No.2, Op.51 No.2 and Op.56 No.1. With the exception of Prelude Op.51 No.2 in A minor (which Scriabin referred to as 'The Broken Strings', and whose tragic atmosphere he compared to the Funeral March from his First Sonata) all of the others are in major keys. This is not merely an indication of his rejection of the minor tonality – 'minor keys must disappear from music... minor is abnormal; minor is an undertone – I deal with overtones'. Since over half the works from 1905 are ostensibly in C major, it also points to his abandonment of the concept that different keys possess specific identities. These exude the impression of being works in progress, or rather, pieces to be fit into a larger jigsaw and which need to be considered against the context of the colossal energy that Scriabin had been devoting since 1903 into the planning of a vast, multi-sensory but ludicrously impractical work, the *Mysterium*: the intended repository of all his musical ideas.

It was in the third period (1910–1914) that Scriabin composed the last five sonatas as well as a number of piano pieces, including the Preludes Op.59 No.2 (1910), Op.67 (1912–3) and Op.74 (from the early summer of 1914). Here, stable tonality and key signature disappear completely. However, Scriabin's interest in symmetrical patterning is highly evident: Op.67, for example, comprises two 35-bar movements in regular circling patterns at different tempi. The Preludes Op.74 were to be his final works. They raise the tantalising question of where Scriabin might have taken 20th-century music had he not tragically died the following year from septicaemia. Scriabin described them as simple yet psychologically complicated – capable of being conceptualised in different ways just as a crystal which can reflect different lights and colours; and, breaking free from perceived time to last, as suggested by No.2, 'for all eternity, for millions of years'.



Russian pianist Dmitri Alexeev is one of the world's most highly regarded artists. His critically acclaimed recitals on the world's leading concert stages and concerto appearances with the most prestigious orchestras have secured his position as one of 'the most remarkable pianists of the day' (*Daily Telegraph*).

He has performed in all major concert halls around the world and has performed with all leading orchestras, among them the Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw of Amsterdam, the five London orchestras, Orchestre de Paris, Israel Philharmonic and the Munich Bavarian Radio Orchestra. He has worked with conductors such as Ashkenazy, Boulez, Dorati, Gergiev, Giulini, Jansons, Muti, Pappano, Rozhdestvensky, Salonen, Svetlanov, Temirkanov, Tilson Thomas and Klaus Tennstedt, among many others.

During recent seasons he was the Artistic Director of the Leeds International Recital Series, and Artistic Director and Artist in Residence of the concert series 'Musis Sacrum' in Arnhem and Nijmegen, in the Netherlands. Alexeev has been a juror for many of the world's most prestigious International Piano Competitions, including the Leeds, Chopin (Warsaw), Van Cliburn, Santander, Beethoven (Vienna) and Tchaikovsky (Moscow) International Piano Competitions. He regularly gives masterclasses around the world. Alexeev became Professor of Piano at the Royal College of Music in 2005. Many of his past and current students are top prize winners at major international piano competitions such as the Leeds, Tchaikovsky, Liszt (Utrecht), Viotti, Sydney, Santander, Scottish, Dublin and Maria Canals International Piano Competitions, to name just a few.

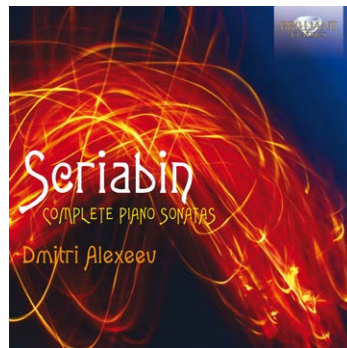
Alexeev has made many fine recordings for EMI, BMG, Virgin Classics, Hyperion and Russian labels. His discs include piano concertos by Schumann, Grieg, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Scriabin, Medtner and solo works by Bach, Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Scriabin, Rachmaninov

and Prokofiev. Following his Virgin Classics recording of the complete Rachmaninov Preludes, which won the Edison Award in the Netherlands, *BBC Music Magazine* described him as 'a pianist at once aristocratic, grand and confessionally poetic. This is an inspiring disc.' In December 2012, his recording of Scriabin's complete Piano Sonatas was released on Brilliant Classics (94388). This was followed by a recording of Scriabin's complete Études (94439), which was released in November 2015, and the present recording of Scriabin's complete Preludes in 2017. Alexeev will be continuing his project of recording Scriabin's complete piano works in 2019 with the Poems, Waltzes and Mazurkas.

His recording of the complete Chopin Mazurkas was released in 2014, an album that *Gramophone* referred to as 'one of the best recordings of the Chopin Mazurkas that have appeared in the past three-quarters of a century – one of the best alongside those of Rubinstein and Yakov Flier'.

www.dmitrialexeev.com

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Scriabin: Complete Piano Sonatas 94388 (2CD)



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